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ZNY CCCCC ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3945
INFO RUEHBP/AMEMBASSY BAMAKO 0183
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1664
RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NIAMEY 1231
RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT 5972
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 2241
RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT 1826
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS 6667

C O N F I D E N T I A L ALGIERS 000929

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/27/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [KISL](#) [SCUL](#) [SOCI](#) [AG](#)
SUBJECT: MINISTRY OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS COUNTERS EXTREMISM

Classified By: DCM Thomas F. Daughton; reasons 1.4 (b, d)

¶1. (C) Algeria's Religious Affairs ministry has mounted a campaign to reign in extremist imams. The campaign promotes a unified, anti-violence version of Islam and will result in important staffing changes in schools and mosques. On June 23, Minister of Religious Affairs M. Boualem Ghoulamallah made clear to Le Quotidien d'Oran journalist Tahar Mansour that the Algerian government is very concerned about mosques, especially those that advocate violence. This comes on the heels of a widely-reported move by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) to counter Islamic extremism, which includes a mosque inspection tour by Ghoulamallah. According to the June 17 edition of the French-language daily El Moujahid, Ghoulamallah is insisting that mosques recover their social role and "bar the path of deviants who threaten society by preying on Algeria's youth."

¶2. (U) On June 23, the Arabic-language daily El-Khabar reported that the MoRA will create a position of Grand Mufti for Algeria, who will be responsible for screening all fatwas. To counter extremist fatwas issued by Egypt's Al Azahar mosque, the ministry is also creating new positions for imams and murshidas (female preachers) who will specialize in writing fatwas.

¶3. (C) MoRA Communications Director Abdullah Tamime has confirmed press reports of the ministry's plans to counter extremism. On June 25, Tamime told us that MoRA was closing Qur'anic schools that preached jihad, as well as those that could not provide adequate records concerning their own funding. He added that the ministry was organizing a national, unified Islamic jurisprudence reference based on the Maliki rite, which should result in the delivery of official and consistent Islamic messages that focus on brotherhood, peace and helping others. By ministerial decree, MoRA plans to designate a focal mosque in each wilaya (province) that will deliver officially prepared sermons.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: MoRA's plans to provide Algeria with official, consistent, kinder and gentler Muslim messages is an important step in countering Islamic extremism. The lack of a recognized senior Islamic jurisprudence scholar in Algeria has allowed -- if not encouraged -- individual imams to provide individualized interpretations of the Qur'an. Consequently, several imams have reinterpreted centuries-old fatwas to suit their current goals, which include justifying killing civilians. With consistent attention, the new measures can make it more difficult for terrorist organizations, including AQIM, to rely on imams and mosques to recruit new members.

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